



Ads for a competition promoting Bond Street cigarettes in the West African country of Togo: contestants stood a chance of winning a mobile phone.

main target: according to one report, even the poorest women who eke out a living by selling produce in the markets flocked to buy a pack, in the hope of winning their own mobiles. No doubt Philip Morris, which is spending millions of dollars to persuade the world it has changed its ways, would have answers to the obvious questions the competition raises about the ethics of promoting an addictive, lethal product to people locked in a daily struggle for the barest essentials of life. For increasing numbers of them, cigarettes will turn out to be the barest essentials of an early death.

The Circumlocution Hall of Fame: and the winner is . . .

In March, many of the world's tobacco control organisations received correspondence from a Geneva based organisation named CASIN (Centre for Applied Studies in International Relations). CASIN requested information on organisations' roles in the WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), annual reports and newsletters, explaining it had "taken the initiative of launching a study on the negotiation" of the FCTC. Smelling the deep fragrance of wolf in sheep's clothing, a quick search revealed that CASIN had supplied Philip Morris with information on tobacco meetings in 1993 and 1996, and was listed as an agency serving Philip Morris in 1997.

I wrote to CASIN's Danielle Ecoffey asking, "Your letter to tobacco control NGOs fails to mention your connection with the tobacco industry. This significant omission is plainly deceptive and unethical. Would you care to make any comment on this prior to my journal running an item on your activities in a forthcoming issue [of *Tobacco Control*]?"

Ecoffey replied on 16 April, "I understand well your concerns. They are legitimate" but by the end of a page of soothing words said nothing about who was paying for the research. I immediately wrote back suggesting that a clerical error in her office must surely have resulted in the wrong letter being sent to me, and followed this up with individual emails to the CASIN board of directors, asking the same question.

On 24 April Ecoffey replied with a weasel worded explanation, now short listed for the Hall of Fame of Circumlocution: "The study we plan to launch on the multilateral negotiation of the WHO FCTC is in no way meant for the tobacco industry." "It will be undertaken in total independence and will be public." "The tobacco industry, as you know, has used the Programme's services occasionally", and "Insofar as the work corresponded to the provision of a service, it has been billed . . . In no case has the Programme worked on behalf either of the tobacco industry or of its agents."

So let's get this straight. "In no case" has CASIN worked for the tobacco industry. But CASIN has billed them for the "work" and "service" it has done for them. It is now doing a report on tobacco control NGOs, but this report is not *meant* for the industry. Such lack of ambiguity will I'm sure inspire huge confidence in CASIN's independence.

CASIN's chairman Jean Freymond also replied a month later and was much clearer: ". . .the study was not initiated at the request of, nor intended for the tobacco industry, nor of or for anyone related to the tobacco industry. It is neither financed nor supported in any way by the tobacco industry or by anyone associated with the tobacco industry . . . This . . . is therefore a completely independent study."

This is interesting. Who would be the market for such a study, which would plainly involve considerable costs needing to be recouped? Tobacco NGOs have any number of ways of knowing about each other and are nearly drowning in a sea of emails

about the FCTC process. They are thoroughly networked and nearly all belong to Globalink and the Framework Convention Alliance. Hardly a receptive market for an expensive report about each other's activities. So who, we might wonder, is likely to be the market for CASIN's report?

Freymond provides an oblique hint. "The research studies aim at assisting policy-makers, negotiators, senior public and private managers in search for policy options in relation to the smoother functioning of the international system and international societies. The nature of the issues covered compels the Programme to enter into relation with various actors involved in the issues... In this context . . . the NGO programme and not CASIN as such has had, and has—since the late 1980s—occasional professional contacts with the tobacco industry."

Tobacco Control understands that very few NGOs replied to CASIN's request. Their report promises to be as compelling as *The complete guide to Swiss naval bases*.

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Editor, *Tobacco Control*

Smoke in the machine: industry's nervous puff over Tobacco Control report

In the June 2001 issue of *Tobacco Control*, Stella Aguinaga Bialous and Derek Yach presented a paper entitled "Whose standard is it, anyway? How the tobacco industry determines the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standards for tobacco and tobacco products" (*Tobacco Control* 2001;10:96–104). Using tobacco industry documents, the authors "describe the extent of the tobacco industry involvement in establishing international standards for tobacco and tobacco products and the industry influence on the [ISO]." Evidently, Big Tobacco was not amused.

Offering only "light and mild" praise for the authors, the tobacco industry has lavished king size attention on their paper, with editorial reinforcements recruited from companies spread across four continents. The heightened display of interest is a sure sign that a nerve had been hit by Bialous and Yach, the Executive Director, Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health Project Manager at the

World Health Organization (WHO), and who also manages WHO's Tobacco-Free Initiative. Clearly, issues of international measurement standards and product regulation are of critical importance to global cigarette marketing strategies.

In the February 2002 edition of *Beiträge zur Tabakforschung* (Contributions to Tobacco Research), a journal sponsored by the *Verband der Cigarettenindustrie* (German Association of Cigarette Industries), Richard R Baker, of BAT, delivers the industry's response, and it is an industry wide rejoinder, not merely the work of BAT. Though Baker, senior principal scientist of BAT Research & Development, is listed as sole author of "The development and significance of standards for smoking-machine technology" (*Beiträge zur Tabakforschung* 2002;20:23–41), he acknowledges the assistance of no less than 20 "colleagues" at BAT's competitors Philip Morris, RJ Reynolds, Imperial Tobacco (UK), and others for this first person, sometimes folksy 19 page effort.

Despite all those industry minds at work, they never mount a charge that could topple the main conclusions of Bialous and Yach that "ISO's tobacco and tobacco products standards are not adequate to guide tobacco products regulatory policies, and no health claims can be made based on ISO's

tobacco products standards". Instead, Baker provides a detailed history of the development of FTC (Federal Trade Commission), CORESTA (Paris-based Cooperation Centre for Scientific Research Relative to Tobacco), and ISO standards for cigarette smoking machines and, in passive-aggressive prose, challenges the *Tobacco Control* authors' integrity.

With almost endearing condescension, Baker says he's "sure that Bialous and Yach wrote the paper with the objective of presenting an unbiased view of the development of the subject", but immediately follows with a challenge to their concentration on "selected quotes from internal company documents, taken out of context". In one such quote, from a 1993 Philip Morris Europe research and development letter, CORESTA is described as "100% controlled by the industry" and the relevant ISO technical committee to be "made of approximately 80% Industry". Baker tries to diminish the significance of this fact by saying that tobacco companies comprise only 44% of the membership, but it turns out the rest of the members come almost exclusively from industry partners and suppliers.

While hoping, with little or no success, to find trivial errors in the Bialous and Yach paper, Baker more importantly ignores the catastrophic impact of reli-

ance on smoking machine readings, and the consequent "low-tar myth". Worse, he states, apparently in earnest, that to his knowledge: "no overt statement has ever been made by the tobacco industry to the public (consumers or the scientific community) that smoking a low 'tar' cigarette is a safer form of smoking." This, despite the fact that one of the Bialous and Yach references is to an earlier *Tobacco Control* paper (Leavell N-R. The low tar lie. *Tobacco Control* 1999;8:433–7) that details just such "overt statements".

A key message of Bialous and Yach's analysis is that the ISO standards have served the industry's interests by "providing the impression of legitimacy to industry claims that cigarettes with lower levels of tar and nicotine yield were less harmful". Baker ultimately, and notwithstanding his own "objective of presenting an unbiased view", reiterates that specious claim. Less tar makes more sense than more tar but, where measurements fail to truly reflect smoking behaviour, less can sadly be more. Smokers who stop puffing consume no tar at all. Those who take false reassurance from machine ranked tar yields do need to know whose standard it is, anyway.

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